

JUST METAPHORS: Marginal illuminations in a colonial retreat*

Philip A. Kearney, Nollaig O'Reilly Byrne, and Imelda Colgan McCarthy **

"Our dream curdled. We awoke, and began to thirst for the restoration of our house".

— (Kinsella, 1980, p 187)

In this article we attempt to narrate an enfolded story in which a marginalised family, their professional network and ourselves are drawn into a vortex of participation. Simultaneously bearing witness to the lived experience of the dispossessed and the constraints of statutory mandates we invoke the metaphor of the "Fifth Province" to access a dialogical space. In this space all are faced toward an ethical domain beyond the idioms of contra-diction and imperative.

The metaphor of 'Colonisation' reminds us to eschew the 'objective' language of the alienating observer. Through vicarious participation in the story of this family our deepest concerns

* It is a feature of Old Irish Manuscripts that illuminations are found in the margins.

** Family Therapy Project, Department of Child & Family Psychiatry, Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin, 7, Ireland.

In the writing of this article, all authors have contibuted equally. Hyphenations are used throughout the text to emphasize certain words, their usages and ambiguities. All names and identifying information have been changed to ensure confidentiality

have been illuminated, all the while being conscious that our endeavours are but paltry offerings for the myriad concerns of the dispossessed.

Introduction

Our work with families from impoverished and marginalised communities and their professional networks constantly reminds us of the many oppressive theories we unwittingly inherit and employ. It was our reflections on one family's story, in particular, which awakened us to the colonising potential of our practice, stifling the native voice in our din of inequity. This article re-presents the story of our attempt to reinstate this voice.

Staying close to home we propose the metaphor of 'colonisation' for the designation of the relationship between so-called 'multi-problem' families and their myriad 'helpers'. In response to threats of disintegration, contiguous with many and serious crises, such families are singularly exposed to recursive crusades of invasion and retreat under benevolent banners of control and treatment. In this new expanded social organisation, "the problem defined/defining system", (McCarthy & Byrne, 1988; Byrne & McCarthy, 1988) the colonised, sustained by the sanctions of the coloniser, maintain their ambivalent partnership in oscillations of revolt and acquiescence.

In the altered proximity between the State and the 'multi-problem' family descriptions of

dependency and helplessness usurp the spirit of autonomy governing this relationship¹. As family and State become anchored to problem descriptions it is as if all of life condenses to this gathering point. Cut off from a past and a future an impoverished present is in danger of being re-presented in recurring impasses. In this mutual confusion of a double domain, 'problem' identity, 'expertly' defined, gains supremacy over 'family' identity obscuring all narrative possibilities of the forgotten and the not yet said.

It was our earlier work with incest-disclosed systems which first enlightened us to the confusion of descriptions which blind the helping professional to the organisation 'family' once the organisation 'incestuous family' has been collectively brought forth. Furthermore we now also discern that any diagnosis in the social body risks being a colonising description, obscuring fluid identities.

Seduced by diagnostic metaphors, professionals may become uniformed into impositional stances. In this eugenic domain, a policy of social control diminishes the other in metaphors of negation.

"For if another can control me, that other has usurped me, and how terribly I seem diminished by this seeming addition" (Stephens, 1978, p 243)

Standing apart, a certain fear fuels this diminishing conquest. **Disguised as love, fear becomes that familiar trace in every control of abuse and in every abuse of control.**

Across the threshold, love features the other in acceptance, affirmation and participation. It *"consists in opening a space of existence for another in co-existence with oneself in a particular domain of interactions."* (Maturana, 1985, p 7)

In citing the metaphor of 'colonisation' we now reframe 'deviancy' as an iatrogenic deformity common to all colonial discourse. Redressing the cultural context of the 'multi-problem' family in our own metaphors, the

'model monopoly' (Braten, 1987; Habermas, 1976) of the professional narrative may be altered. Liberated from the imposed text of a colonial monologue the problem discourse might be refreshed in diverse cultural streams. Our consultation model, the "Fifth Province", (McCarthy, 1986; McCarthy & Byrne, 1988) seeks to deconstruct the tentacles of colonial and moralistic piety (Bennington, 1988) which compose this iatrogenic frame. The metaphoric space of the 'Fifth Province' (Hederman & Kearney, 1977, p 10) allows for the possibility of recuperation in a deeply wounded narrative. In this shift from piety to ethics, a strident supremacy yields space to a native discourse. As such the model we propose is our attempt to avoid the hubris of "the expert" in the evocation of multiple dialogues determining themselves anew in each local immersion. The potential tyranny of consensus is eluded within a domain of co-operative dissensus. Following Lyotard (1988), the principle we espouse "is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard, p xxv).

The homeland

Locating the story is a public housing area in Dublin, originally constructed as a barracks for the British Army in the last century. Subsequent to their expulsion, the poor and the marginalised soon found occupancy there. During the 1960's these tenements were demolished to make way for new flats (apartment blocks). In the wake of this demolition, dispersal and renewal, community identity and sense of place were ruptured and dislocated. It is now a well distinguished area with a population of approximately six hundred people

1. In Article 41 of the Constitution of Ireland, "The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law" (Bunreacht na hEireann, Dublin, Government Publications Office, 1937)

harbouring much adversity. Concrete blocks, courtyards and towers now elevate the old place, this being the only upward mobility in accord with this renewal. Church, school, health and social welfare office, hospital and prison secure the boundaries to the outside, the latter having the most detaining merit.

Within this bounded estate of flats boundless passions vitalise a subsistent living. Unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and crime are familiar neighbours. In recent years cider, solvents, uppers, downers and heroin have become the high spirited pushers in the eruption of a thieving and violent youth.

A sizeable proportion of the homeland population is comprised of the descendents of four genealogically related families. These families preserve the vestiges of old tribal ways of nomadic households and an oral tradition of pithy narratives. They make few, if any, concessions to the ethos of the contemporary 'nuclear family'.

The Bard 'family'²

For the purpose of this article we will describe two generations of the Bard Tribe as if a conventional 'nuclear' unit is implied. This punctuation is arbitrary as approximately eighty-six other relatives are scattered throughout the flats. This network has continued to assert its idiosyncratic identity in the face of the many interventions and blandishments of Church and State. Within this Tribe, the smaller unity of 'family' is subsumed.

Perpetuating the endogamous pattern in the homeland, the marriage of Jerry and Eileen, scions of two principal families, attempted to sustain the coherence of this community's regeneration. However, at the point of referral they had been living apart for seven years. Jerry, as the oldest son, became chief of his tribe on his father's death eleven years previously. He is currently involved in a 'new', if inconstant, relationship with his oldest daughter's erstwhile friend.

Like most of his male peers, Jerry has spent time in prison, and has a considerable reputation in the community both for achieving this status and, more commonly, for evading it. He and Eileen, both in their late thirties, have six children ranging in age from twenty-one to ten years. The second youngest child, Kevin, aged twelve years, is profoundly brain damaged following an accident eight years ago. The three oldest children, Annie, Ernie and Tommie abuse pills, alcohol and solvents prolifically in whatever combination available and are respectively described as psychotic, homicidal and suicidal. Peggy, aged fourteen years, no longer attends school. Paddy, aged ten years, has been out of school for the past year. The children mostly reside with their mother but can find whimsical refuge with their various relatives in and around the flats for days or weeks at a time.

The paternal grandmother, Sheila, having borne nineteen children, is a matriarchial institution. Despite the onset of Parkinson's disease she celebrates this status by a daily vigil on her balcony caressing the Bible and remonstrating with all through a veil of incense. All her children have spent unavailing sojourns in reformatory institutions. Her endorsement of her eldest son's elevated status in the tribe is reflected in her statement, "I'd prefer my sons to my husband any day". Jerry maintains his position through his reputation for strength, exercised through sporadic and mysterious appearances, settling scores and securing the safety of the tribe. Despite absence from the household of his wife and children, news of upheaval amongst them is quickly carried to him by unnamed couriers. These feuds, he settles in the courtyard in full public view.

More recently, in the case of Ernie and Annie, their ritualistic aggression threatened father's dominion and had moved unpredictably and

2. Among the Celts the Bards were minstrels, poets and storytellers. They were a highly organised society and mostly sang or narrated folk poetry and ballads.

indiscriminately into ever widening circles of attention. Broken free from the aggressive control of Jerry and the protective and helpless remonstrations of Eileen, the spectre of mortal and tribal disintegration began to run through these escalating sprees.

The dark cloud of the legacy of reformation, haunting previous generations, rolled ominously overhead threatening family dispersal. Fearfully Eileen struggled to find a new solution on behalf of her children.

The professionals

For some years we have been meeting with a colleague, Sister Emer, whose commitment to the theology of liberation led her out of the security of congregational and professional life and into the turmoil of the homeland. At home with these people she listened to their stories, learned their language, befriended some and became a valued resource to many. Sister Emer used our meetings as a forum for 'distancing' herself from the immediacy of her situation and we exploited this opportunity for vicarious participation.

Despite our long established collegial relationship with Sister Emer, we managed to maintain the format of team consultation. This artificial distancing strengthened our respective awareness of different contexts all the while deeply influencing each other. While constantly surprised and intrigued by Sister Emer's tightly knotted descriptions of the fantastic, the jocular and the tragic, we sensed that she was opening up to us a world usually inaccessible to therapy's ivory tower. What she now expressed was a desire to see if the practice lens of our experience might evoke a discourse in the re-versing of the relationship between family and State. Her questions fitted with our aspirations. She gave us an opportunity to re-work, in extreme situations, our particular practice.

In retrospect we could speculate that the Bards were brought to us by Sister Emer at a point when, both she and we respectively were

attempting to identify a common ground in the genres of discourse sometimes known as 'liberation theology' and 'systemic practice'. Her witness to the necessary vicissitudes of this family and community, when coupled with our vicarious questioning, brought forth a mosaic of the multiple interfaces implicated in this narration. Thus the Bards were to become, for us, in the smithy of our practice, a signal artifice in the forging of this exemplary consciousness (see Joyce, 1967, p 253).

At the point of referral there were eleven agencies actively working with various members of the Bards. Representing these agencies were social workers, psychiatrists, drug counsellors, youth workers, the police, teachers, staff of a metal handicap centre, a community worker, a probation officer and a school attendance officer. Over time their shared reported response was one of ongoing frustration and impotence.

Collectively the key workers, Sister Emer, the probation officer and the school attendance officer, did not wish to repeat the history of statutory interventions which previous generations of the Bards had known. It might be said that there was also an ambivalent fascination with the vigour, vitality and violence of this wayward tribe. However, it was only when the family's self-destructive passions flared beyond previous thresholds and the net of state control and protection tightened, that a vantage point was sought by the professionals in this spiralling and "widening gyre" (Yeats, 1984, p 187).

To-wards a story of the dispossessed

Within the imagined 'Fifth Province', re-versing the story of the Bards and their attendants is our attempt to re-view all anew in language. The telling, retelling and translation of these stories is its own goal (Wilden, 1980, p 67). Past stories are re-sourced and future possibilities glimpsed. In this interweave of stories illuminating texts and con-texts, narrators and witnesses are reinstated.

"To say that narration is a recital which orders the past is not to imply that it is a conservative closure to what is new. On the contrary, narration preserves the meaning that is behind us so that we can have meaning before us. There is always more order in what we narrate than in what we have actually already lived." (Ricoeur, 1984, p 21).

Siting ourselves in imagination we attempt to bring forth the many and often contradictory stories within the problem defined/defining system. In this endeavour we have constructed a shorthand in the form of diamond shaped maps or symbols. As a totality these maps illustrate two potentially anti-social arrangements (Maturana & Varela, 1980; 1987) which we imagine in situations of escalating symmetry and monopolistic complementarity. Following Bateson (1978) and Wilden (1980) we have referred to these two symbols as "the competitive symmetrical system and the co-operative complementary system" (McCarthy & Byrne, 1988; Byrne & McCarthy, 1988). The 'diamonds' reflect the knowledge we claim in relation to the organisation of these social 'realities' which we compose whilst simultaneously composing them. (Byrne & McCarthy, 1988).

The construction and deconstruction of these diamond symbols require our participation. They are imaginary organisations whose reflexivity is confirmed in every application which is their only significance.

By dis-positioning ourselves in imagination, both at the heart and the periphery of the diamond, the 'Fifth Province', the multiple stories and views of participants may be remembered and the negating organisations dissolved. Created is a circular procession where stories are told and retold, a discourse without beginning or end.

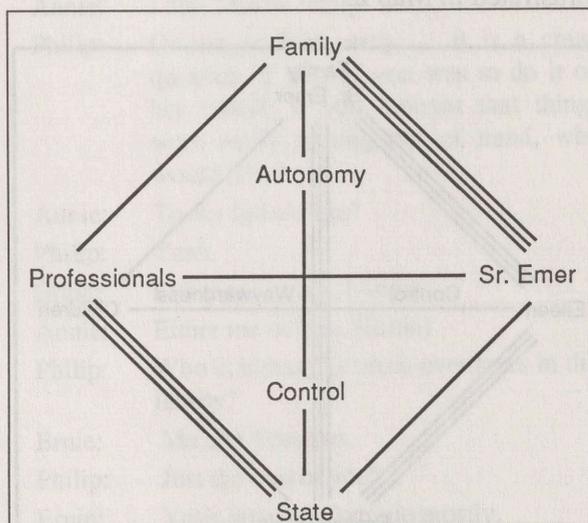
The first session

Eileen, like many of the mothers in the flats found solace in relating to Sister Emer the wearied saga of her wayward children. As the

older children seemed completely beyond her influence, and the two younger ones set to follow a similar course, professional recourse to the courts seemed inevitable.

In the face of Eileen's devotion, helpless protection and her sole aspiration to keep her children close to her, there was no stomach for this action.

In response to Sister Emer's concern we suggested that the probation and school attendance officers be included in the first consultation. The latter came with a mixture of curiosity and relief. The diamond we constructed at the point of our first meeting is illustrated below⁴.



MAP 1. *Straddling divides: A potentially dis-membering organisation*

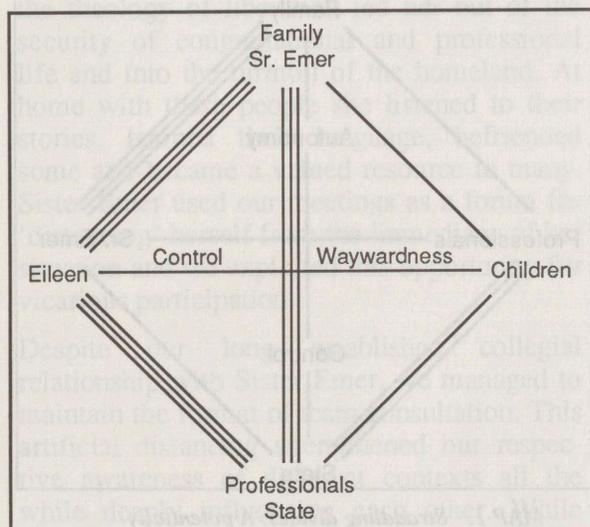
This is a competitive symmetrical system embodying potential for division into polar oppositions in escalating monologues.

Eileen as protectress of her children (family) is in a competitive relationship with the controlling State. The professionals and Sister Emer are situated in different contexts with competitive agendas as parental surrogates. Sister Emer is accountable only to mother (and

4. In illustrating the diamonds, triple and single lines are used to indicate, respectively, alignments and non alignments.

family) while the professionals are accountable to the State.

The focus of the consultation at this point was to elicit a connecting relational view which might place Sister Emer and the professionals in a co-operative relationship. In conversation with them around their joint concerns for this burdened and bewildered mother, the themes of maternal adversity and childhood waywardness were brought forth. In juxtaposing these complementary perspectives, the potential divisions faded in their resonating aspirations. Mother's central position in regard to issues of control of her children was thus reinstated. This co-operative complementary system is illustrated in Map 2.



MAP 2: Co-operation on behalf of wayward children

In this movement of adults into a co-operative alliance, depicted above, the silencing of the children is implicated.

Sister Emer by reason of her proximity to mother undertook to convene all meetings of family members and professionals. Despite the heightened interest of all a great uncertainty remained as to whether this unruly 'mob' of children could be 'frog-marched' into a clinic. Map 2 depicts this uncertainty, where the spectre of voicelessness had moved from mother to children. However, the proposal by

Sister Emer to convene a 'family meeting' with the professionals and a team of 'experts' appeared to have a powerful impact on the children. The idea that outsiders might define them as a family fitted with their desired identity and their fear of its imminent disintegration. In this extraordinary convention the task for us became one of 'shaping' a conversational organisation through the remembered bits of a divisively abandoned, wayward childhood. Tenderly, aggressively and mirthfully they devote themselves to a family interview as if it were a solemn affair.

Attending the first session were Eileen and her children together with Sister Emer, the probation and school attendance officers. Philip meets with the family and professionals while Imelda and Nollaig participate behind a one-way screen. Bearing in mind the potential for silencing the children's voices Philip proceeded to open a conversation with them where the theme of waywardness might be voiced in their own descriptions. As if Annie could read our mind and without prompting she starts the conversation, "things are going very badly in the family. We are giving my mother a hard time". In this double description, she has articulated our complementary juxtaposition of 'control' and 'waywardness'. As the oldest child, her statement is the opening cue. Philip merely follows, pitting his questions at our imagined extremes. Paddy, the youngest, stretches the story to a coherent closure, "if she (mother) had left there would be nothing left of the family."

Annie: Things are going very badly in the family. We are giving my mother a hard time.

Philip: Who would you say is the most potentially destructive or violent of them all, Mrs Bard?

Mother: (points to Annie)

Philip: Annie?

Mother: Annie mostly, yeah, Annie would smash windows and all.

Philip: So if there was a danger of somebody getting killed, who do you think is most

- likely to do the killing and get killed?
- Ernie: Either me or Annie.
- Philip: Which, kill or be killed?
- Annie: I would say me.
- Ernie: I would say her.
- Philip: You are most likely to be murderous, is that right?
- Annie: (*nods head*) ... or be murdered.
- Philip: Or be murdered.
- Ernie: When Annie goes to fight, she fights to the death, you know, she doesn't stop until she is exhausted.
- Philip: I see, so who do you think she is most likely to kill, Ernie, if somebody were to be killed?
- Annie: If I had the choice to kill somebody?
- Philip: Well, sometimes you don't need a choice, but if you had a choice.
- Annie: My father, I suppose.
- Philip: Yeah.
- Ernie: But that is the same for us all.
- Philip: Yeah.
- Mother: They can be very vicious with one another.
- Philip: Yeah, who would you think is most at risk of, if not being killed, being seriously injured by you?
- Annie: I don't really know.
- Ernie: If she was to have a fight in the family it would be me and her that would take the fight.
- Philip: To each other, you mean?
- Ernie: It is me and her that would take the fight, say she was to fight with my mother or that, I would leave them (siblings) out of it and it would be me and her that would take the fight.
- Philip: You would move in?
- Ernie: Yeah, I would move them out of the way and I would take the fight, you know.
- Philip: Yeah, O.K.
- Ernie: Then it would be me and her.
- Philip: And who are you most likely to kill or seriously injure, Ernie?
- Ernie: If I was in a temper, you mean?
- Philip: Yeah, I do, exactly.
- Ernie: Anyone who stands in my way.
- Philip: And in the family?
- Ernie: No, I would not harm any of them. No, anyone else who stands in my way.
- Philip: Right, right. If ... this is a crazy question now ... if your mother were to choose one of you to murder your Dad, who do you think it would be?
- Ernie: Me.
- Paddy: Ernie.
- Philip: What do you think, Annie?
- Annie: I don't know really.
- Philip: Or not so less crazy ... it is a crazy question. If one of you was to do it on her behalf, if you thought that things were really getting out of hand, who would it be?
- Annie: To my father, like?
- Philip: Yeah.
- Ernie: Either me or her. (Annie)
- Annie: Either me or him. (Ernie)
- Philip: Who is it that has taken overdoses in this family?
- Ernie: Me and Tommie.
- Philip: Just the two of you?
- Ernie: Yeah, me and Tommie mostly.
- Philip: Have you taken overdoses? (*to Annie*)
- Annie: I have.
- Ernie: One.
- Paddy: Two.
- Annie: I take a lot of tablets in the day.
- Philip: Yeah, but have you taken deliberate overdoses?
- Annie: Yeah, twice.
- Philip: Twice. You tried to kill yourself?
- Annie: (*looks to mother*) No.
- Ernie: No he (Tommie) is the only one who tried to kill himself.
- Philip: He is the only one who has tried to kill himself (*Tommie nods*) ... using tablets

- or what?
- Tommie: Tablets and drink.
- Philip: And when was this, Tommie?
- Tommie: About two years ago.
- Paddy: Two years ago.
- Ernie: No, it was about a year ago, he tried to drown himself.
- Philip: As well as or together with ... ?
- Ernie: He had tablets. The two of us were after taking tablets and drink and he tried to drown himself. He jumped into the canal and I jumped after him and pulled him out and he jumped back in again and I was too tired as I was too stoned to do anything else.
- Philip: Yeah.
- Ernie: And then I pulled him back out again and then he jumped back in again and he pulled a fellow in with him, that was hanging around with us, that could not swim, so then I brought the two of them out again.
- Philip: You must have been very tired.
- Ernie: And then he tried to hang himself the last time.
- Philip: He tried to hang himself.
- Ernie: Yeah.
- Philip: And what happened?
- Ernie: *(To Tommie)* You were taken out of a graveyard or something, weren't you?
- Tommie: I don't know.
- Philip: Who found you?
- Tommie: I don't remember
- Philip: You don't know who found you?
- Tommie: No, I don't even remember doing it.
- Philip: *(To Mother)* And which of them do you think is most likely to harm themselves, through overdosing or whatever, Mrs Bard?
- Mother: I think mostly Tommie ... can be about the most depressed, in that ... and he is inclined to ... Ernie will take tablets, but it might not be with the intention to kill himself but he would just keep on taking them you know, he has often walked over to the flats, when there are drugs around and he was three days out of his mind, you know, and I had him taken out of the flats and home.
- Philip: So would you think that Tommie is the most likely candidate for suicide?
- Mother: Yeah.
- Philip: And after Tommie?
- Mother: Ernie or Annie, but I don't know if they would just take them at the moment but not think that they are going to ... not really wanting to kill themselves ...
- Philip: Would you say that your mother might commit suicide, Ernie?
- Ernie: If we keep on going on the way we are she will.
- Philip: You think so?
- Ernie: Yeah.
- Philip: When did you first think of that as a possibility?
- Ernie: The last four or five months
- Annie: I would say my mother would have taken her life long ago if my brother wasn't the way he is today, she knows he is depending on her, you know.
- Philip: Which brother, Kevin?
- Annie: Kevin, yeah, Kevin is brain damaged too.
- Philip: Yes.
- Annie: He can't walk or anything
- Philip: So you think if it weren't for him, your mother would have killed herself a long time ago?
- Annie: Ah yes, if it weren't for him she wouldn't be here today or neither would we, you know.
- Philip: I see, what would have happened?
- Annie: She would either have killed herself or left us.
- Philip: I see, yeah.
- Ernie: And we would be after driving her to do it.
- Paddy: And if she had died, we would have killed ourselves.
- Ernie: Then if she died we would have killed

ourselves and if she went everything would have been worse and worse and worse.

Tommie: And we probably would have followed her.

Philip: Yes, O.K ...

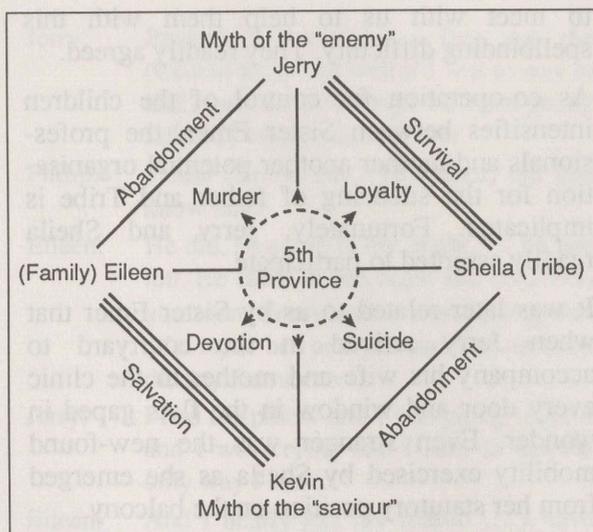
Paddy: If she left us there would be nothing left of the family.

The children have constructed mother and Kevin as a tragic constancy — the metaphor of 'love', in which they as the unmaimed participate vicariously. Father, as the inconstant betrayer of mother, brings forth in the children an equally vicarious hatred on her behalf. In this voiceless predicament, the metaphor of 'hate' promises a more immediate relational proximity in which they might be of consequence. Paradoxically in hating the "enemy" of mother they are simultaneously deeply connected to a tribal legacy of revenge, indiscriminantly expressed in the service of a tragedy, in which they are of no consequence.

In this frank accounting, guilt and aggression are widely oscillating and partnered divisions, continually non-sensed in loyalty to an apparently divided childhood, of which the children are innocent.

The theme is elegaic and is developed in accounts of father's desertion, mother's heroic abandonment to Kevin and her tenuous hold on life. Without regret or rancour the lived experience is resuscitated in a relay from mouth to mouth. Extreme events portrayed as casual paradoxically heighten the communication of an heroic tone.

Map 3 illustrates the team dis-position through Philip's requests for elaboration of the children's stories of loyalty, division and potential violent escalation. An apparent central siting places the team at the confluence of these themes. Father and Kevin as 'enemy' and 'saviour' respectively, are those mythic polar templates constructing the claim to family identity in the minds of the children. On divided foundations of enmity and love, survival and salvation, loyalty and devotion,



MAP 3: The children's mythic divisions re-membered.

the children bring forth their membership in echoing this rupture.

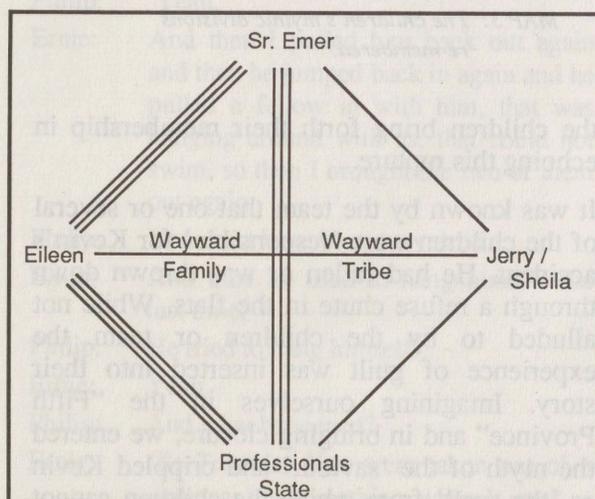
It was known by the team that one or several of the children were 'responsible' for Kevin's accident. He had fallen or was thrown down through a refuse chute in the flats. While not alluded to by the children or team the experience of guilt was inserted into their story. Imagining ourselves in the "Fifth Province" and in bringing closure, we entered the myth of the 'saviour' and crippled Kevin as 'the spell' from which the children cannot awaken. "Spell" was used to connote the various states of loss of control, intoxication and powerlessness which they exhibited. As a further invitation to the dis-solution of the divided scenario the team proposed that the mythic 'enemy' must be present to their release. In these reversals the children may be exonerated from guilt and Kevin and father returned to ordinary membership in the family.

When the conversation with the children ended the team proposed to Sister Emer and Eileen that an invitation be extended to Jerry and Sheila to attend the next session. The children were told that it was necessary for their parents, grandmother, Sister Emer, the probation officer and school attendance officer

to meet with us to help them with this spellbinding difficulty. They readily agreed.

As co-operation for control of the children intensifies between Sister Emer, the professionals and mother another potential organisation for the silencing of father and Tribe is implicated. Fortunately, Jerry and Sheila readily assented to participate.

It was later related to us by Sister Emer that when Jerry arrived in the courtyard to accompany his wife and mother to the clinic every door and window in the flats gaped in wonder. Even stranger was the new-found mobility exercised by Sheila as she emerged from her statutory position on the balcony.



MAP 4: A co-operative organisation for the potential exclusion (dis-memberment) of father and tribe.

As the conversation opens we are introduced to tribal justice through the voices of Sheila and Jerry.

Philip: He (paternal grandfather) is dead now I presume?

Sheila: Yeah, eleven years.

Philip: And what did he die of?

Sheila: A heart attack.

Philip: A heart attack.

Sheila: Eh ... trouble started on the balcony, it was my daughter, started the trouble and

five people came up to the door ...

Jerry: A fellow hit him, a fellow gave him a bang on his head.

Sheila: A bang on his head and he just went in ...

Philip: Was this a fight or was it ...

Jerry: An argument happened over my young sister and another girl out of the flats and the girl and my sister, who was in the argument with her, her people were coming up along the square or up along the flats and she ran over and she told them, so they went up to the door to my Da and there were none of us there, or anything. So this fellow started arguing with my Da and my Da told him to get away from the door and he jumped up and gave him a smack in his head.

Philip: Yeah.

Jerry: My father went in to the room and tried to get up, to make it to the chair or something, he never made it anyway.

Philip: He had the heart attack there and then?

Jerry: Yeah.

Philip: He died?

Jerry: There and then, yeah.

Philip: Oh my God.

Jerry: So what the police did was to take me out of my house and take my other brother out of my house and put us into custody.

Philip: Over what now, Jerry?

Jerry: In case we went out and did our own thing. (got revenge)

Sheila: Over the killing of the Da.

Philip: Oh, I see.

Jerry: In case we went out and did our own thing ourselves.

Philip: Yeah, yeah.

Jerry: Which we did after anyhow.

Philip: You got your revenge, did you?

Jerry: Oh we did, yeah. (Sheila looks at her son)

Philip: What did you do?

Jerry: Well the guy died of a heart attack after,

himself, twelve months after my father.

Philip: Aha.

Sheila: He used to take epileptic fits, you know.

Philip: (*confused*) Your husband did?

Sheila: No, the chap.

Philip: The chap, yeah.

Sheila: The chap took epileptic fits and he (Jerry) said to me and his wife, to go on up to the corner shop and get a few messages and when you come back I will have everything done, so we came back at twelve o'clock ...

Jerry: I did it for him. (*avenged his father's death*)

Philip: (*Not sure if he heard correctly*) What?

Jerry: I did it for him.

Philip: What was the impact of your Da's death on the family, Jerry?

Jerry: Ah, I think it broke us all up.

Sheila: A pushed heart attack, oh what happened?

Philip: Yeah, in the family, I mean. ...

Jerry: How did the family ...

Sheila: They all scattered.

Philip: Did they?

Jerry: The whole family broke up.

Philip: And was there a gap in the family after that?

Jerry: When my father left, yeah there was, the gap that he left is still there.

Philip: Did anyone move into it ... fill that gap.

Jerry: Well I more or less went in and took over from him.

Philip: We talked the two previous times with your wife and children about other major events like Kevin's accident

Jerry: (*voice breaking*) That was just. ... that was ... I wouldn't even go into that now, you know what I mean.

Philip: It is too upsetting?

Jerry: I think I would still be at home to-day if that had not happened to Kevin, you know.

Philip: Oh.

Jerry: Because I know for a fact and she (Eileen) knows as well if I was to stay in that house for three days with that young fellow, I would smother him.

Philip: I didn't know that. (*To Eileen*) did you know that?

Eileen: He did, he came in one night. ... he had left. He came in one night and (*to Jerry*) you were drunk and I was putting him (Kevin) to bed and you came up and you did say that to me ...

Jerry: I had the pillow and I was going to do it and I was crying and I said to her the only way I can ...

Eileen: And I nearly lost my reason ... I have never really forgotten that, you know ...

Jerry: I mean you are looking at a child who was perfect and running around and like this ... It was unfortunate that it had to be him that it happened to, you know.

Eileen: But he is so lovable.

Philip: Did you hear what Eileen has just said, that he could be so lovable. Because I was very struck by your kids talk about how important Kevin is in the family.

Jerry: I mean Kevin is everything, I mean if anything happened to him now, I don't know, like but there is no way could I live with the guy, you know. I couldn't live in the same house as him or I can't even bear to look at him the way ... not ... not bear to look at him. Don't get me wrong ... everytime I go up there and I see Kevin, I think of the way he was, you know what I mean. I cannot accept what happened to him.

Philip: And you are saying that that is the reason why you are not in the house, that is why you left?

Jerry: Well that was ... that was really the breaking point between me and her then, you know. She took a nervous breakdown. I was running to the hospital to her, I was running to the hospital in the morning, at dinner time and in the evening to Kevin and she was in hospital six or seven months, whatever it

was and I was trying to manage the kids on my own, by myself. It was just too much. I just couldn't cope and that was it. I ended up cracking up myself then as well.

Philip: What happened?

Jerry: Ah well, I took a couple of overdoses (*voice trembles*) and that myself, you know. And then I said to myself I would be better off getting rid of him (Kevin) rather than getting rid of myself. Do you know that sort of way?

Philip: Ah hah, yeah.

Jerry: And I think I would have 'n' anyway.

Philip: And is it still the same for you?

Jerry: Oh yeah, I still feel the same way about it, yeah, even to the present day. I mean I have talked to her of this before.

Eileen: No, I never heard those points so much before, I really didn't. I didn't think you felt that strongly. I thought it was due to the ... you were just drunk that night.

Jerry: It is just like having a building and you going away on holidays for a week and just looking and your building is just condemned. I mean it is the same way with Kevin, I mean, Kevin is going to need to be lifted around for the rest of his life. I mean there is no way he is ever going to be able to live a life.

Philip: Who gets blamed for Kevin's accident?

Jerry: Well I always blame Ernie for Kevin's accident.

Philip: Uh huh.

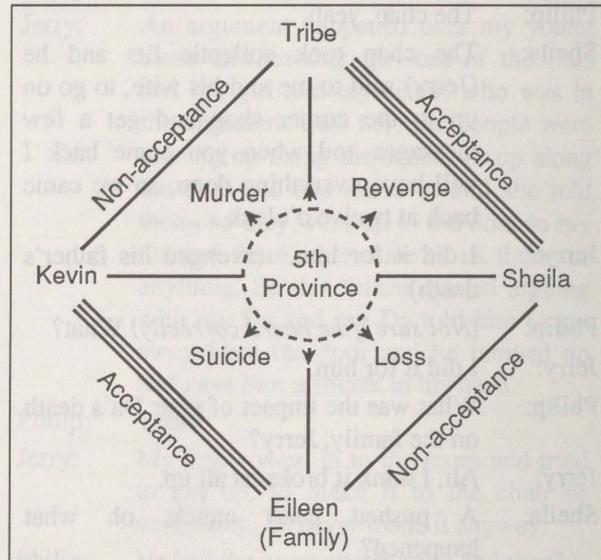
Jerry: And I always will.

Philip: And how does that effect your relationship with Ernie?

Jerry: Ah it doesn't effect my relationship with Ernie now because I mean he was only a child himself.

As chief of the tribe, since his father's death, Jerry is locked into the idiom of the 'old world'. This is his gesture of loyalty to Sheila. A tribal solution makes Kevin expendable. As he looks across at the 'new world' where even a crippled child is valuable he can find no

belonging. For Eileen's sake he has severed his membership to the new unit. Caught between these raw divisions of 'tribe' and 'family' his conversation echoed wished-for connections. Imagining this to be so, the team followed these tender threads.



MAP 5: *Father re-membered.*

Reeling in the face of this violent account the team struggled for a frame of tenderness. Using the notion of positive connotation (Palazzoli et al, 1978) we asked ourselves how innocence might be recuperated amid such guilt. Not judging, not accepting and resonating with the narratives of the 'old' and the 'new' worlds, the figure of Kevin emerged among us as a liberating 'spell'.

This haunting image of a maimed and voiceless child cast about in the life of the family ineffably called us inside, where speaker and listener, family, professionals and team were indistinguishable participants. (Byrne & McCarthy, 1988, pp 180-181)

Moving beyond the conflict of loyalties to family and Tribe by both father and children and at one with them, in a frame of tenderness, we re-named the 'saviour', Kevin, as the 'spell' which captivated. Dispelling guilt and displacing ourselves in imagination (the 'Fifth

Province') we called forth the innocent eyes of Kevin to re-view this narrative. Here was a symbol of the dispossessed and voiceless everywhere, now raised aloft as a fragile host inviting a communion of innocence.

Philip: It has been very helpful that you came to-day. It has really helped to clarify things for us. We were very struck by speaking with your children, that they were in a dilemma. They could not decide which way to go. It seemed that if they went one way and were loyal to their father and the Bards (Tribe) they would end up being disloyal to their mother.

Jerry: (nods) Yeah.

Philip: And the other way around, if they stayed and were good kids with their mother, they would be disloyal to their father and the Bards. But now we realise that there is much more to it than that. It goes much deeper than that and the story that you have told us about Kevin is absolutely central ... that it seems that the family's possibilities ... in a sense stopped with Kevin's accident. That the possibilities of people in this family, going on to a life of happiness and fulfilment stopped because of Kevin's injury and his handicap. It is as if when you look into his face you say something like, "I cannot enjoy my wife, my kids, my family because of what happened to you". It almost comes across that way and that everybody in the family is under a spell. That because this child was injured and handicapped you tell yourselves you are not free. In a sense it is as if he has all the innocence ...

Jerry: (nods) Yeah.

Philip: and everybody else has all the guilt. So that is what we now see as the spell that this family is under and that it is for you people (father, mother and grandmother) to decide whether that is going to continue or not. Because if you don't, there is no doubt but that the outside

(pointing to the professionals) society will intervene ...

Jerry: um ...

Philip: and they will come and place your kids in care and they will be doing it for the best reasons in the world. But somewhere in there, there is the possibility to change that for yourselves.

We imagine that if we could see the world, see the family through Kevin's eyes, we would see only the good side, of being taken care of, of people smiling at him, people doing things for him. I would say he would see an awful lot of good about the people in this family.

Jerry: I would agree with that alright, like if it was Kevin looking out and like the way he is, yeah.

Philip: Yeah.

Jerry: Of course he would, yeah.

Philip: He has had an extraordinarily powerful influence in this family. It is as if everyone is going around under a spell since his accident, really.

Jerry: Well that is what the priest said to us, the priest in the hospital. "This is going to change your lives, completely. When you walk outside the door now, after you know the news, you know how had things are, it is going to be a completely different world out there. Even the road you walk on is going to seem different, walking back down"

Philip: O.K. well we are saying that we believe it doesn't have to be like that always, but that that has something to do with the attitude that the adults in the family have about Kevin and his handicap, like it seems to us that you have made a huge sacrifice since then, you gave up a lot.

Jerry: I gave up everything that meant anything to me.

Philip: Yeah, and Eileen gave up a lot too.

Jerry: She did of course, yeah.

Philip: Maybe you have paid whatever dues (debts) have to be paid and maybe for

your kids' sake you need perhaps to stop paying them. I don't know, it is just a thought. Because otherwise the kids may think they have to go on paying them for ever ...

Jerry: I know yeah. (*rubbing his eyes*)

Philip: And that is the way they are behaving.

Jerry: I know what you mean, like they feel guilty as well.

Philip: Yeah and they maybe think that the only way that they can be in the world is to continue to pay those dues (debts) and they don't have to.

Jerry: (*nods*)

Philip: Because Kevin is not asking it of them.

Jerry: I know that, yeah.

In the four years since this meeting no one has died, been jailed or hospitalised. This Tribal family continues to exhibit its archetypal shape, while now holding itself more aloof from professional intervention. Sister Emer remains as a neighbourly resource both to them and other families in the flats. Our conversations with her regarding the relevance of systemic practice to issues of justice and poverty continue. The other professionals reported a dramatic decrease in tension and experienced a release from the impossible double agendas of statutory mandates and endless caretaking.

Conclusion

The metaphor of 'colonisation' stands for us as an invocation of our myriad 'professional' practices. In invoking and repudiating this tradition we acknowledge the creation of a new prejudice.

This novelty is our prejudicial offering for a similar invocation and repudiation. Its postulation and development offers neither closure nor resolution but merely an expanded horizon — our own.

In the 'Fifth Province' we plead with ourselves for a passionate reflexive moment en

route to the not yet said. A story, roughly hewn from the lived experience divines that moment of recognition in a riveting participation. In this Bardic recital, all professional knowing faded into a suspended silence awaiting an innocent re-call. Here Kevin, as the symbolic repository of innocence became the reminding proxy for the articulation of this view.

"Knowing" that an innocent view can never return to us we pause as silent witnesses to the alienating, impoverishing rupture between ourselves and the dispossessed.

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